

Birmingham Friends Meetinghouse
East side of Birmingham Road, at
intersection with Meetinghouse Road
Birmingham (Birmingham Township)
Chester County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1193

HABS
PA,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. Pa-1193

BIRMINGHAM FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

Location: On County Road #15087 about 1 mile south of State Route #926 (Street Road), Birmingham Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner Birmingham Friends Meeting, Mary C. Passmore, Clerk, West Chester R.D. #4, Pa.

Brief Statement of Significance: Wounded British troops were carried to this 1763 Meeting house during the Battle of Brandywine.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Birmingham Friends Meeting, Mary C. Passmore, Clerk, West Chester R.D. #4, Pa.
2. Date of erection: 1763. Diary of Benjamin Hawley (original in Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa.) under date of 6th mo. 13th, 1763: "P.S. West to the raising of ye meeting house."
3. Architect, builder, suppliers, etc.: Unknown
4. Original plans, construction etc.: No plans known. Original meeting house was 38' by 41' with sliding partitions to divide the men's meetings from that of the women at monthly meetings, etc.
5. Notes on alterations and additions: In 1818 enlargements were completed, and the meeting house was made ca 17 1/2' longer. The sliding partitions were removed and new ones placed in the center of the enlarged building. Similar stone was used in this addition which has a door and window to the south, a window to the north and a door to the east. A door to the grave yard may have been closed at this time or about ten years later at the time of the great separation. The older sheds for protection of horses were torn down in 1895 and the later ones, built in 1875, were removed in 1940.
6. Important old views and references:
Old Views: The following may be seen in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester Pennsylvania. Oil painting on shingle by a Mrs. Liggett, supposedly c. 1864. In the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa. Copies of other views may also all be seen there.

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Benjamin J. Lossing: Pictorial Field Book of the American Revolution. Haper & Brothers, New York 1855. Vol. 2, p. 169.

Cut on "Map of the Borough Westchester, Chester County, Pa. Survey 7 Drawn by Martin & Kennedy" 1856. This view shows the horse sheds etc.

J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope: History of Chester County, Pennsylvania. Louis H. Everts, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 1881, Page 234.

References: Sources of information, all to be found in the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania unless otherwise noted.

Two Hundred Fifty Years of Quakerism at Birmingham 1690-1940. Pub. by Birmingham Friends, West Chester, Pa. 1940.

Classified printed and manuscript files at Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa. under headings Birmingham Township. Churches - SOCIETY OF FRIENDS Birmingham Township. Lands.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The first meeting house was authorized to be built in 1718; the meetings being held in private homes before that time. The original part of the present stone building was erected in 1763 and it is there that the British took their wounded during the Battle of Brandywine, September 1777.

Birmingham meeting was first authorized to be held in 1690 at the home of William Brinton, a plank house of four inch thick poplar planks 21' by 25' and a story and a half high. In 1940, at the 240th anniversary of this founding, an excellent book on the history of the meeting was issued and reference is made to it.

- C. Supplemental Material:

From "Some Account of the British Army, Under the Command of General Howe, and of the Battle of Brandywine, on the Memorable September 11th, 1777, and the Adventures of That Day, Which Came to the Knowledge and Observation of Joseph Townsend, Late of Baltimore, Md.... Published by Townsend Ward, No. 4S Fourth Street, Philadelphia. Press of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. 1846"

"As the object of these memoranda is to recite some particulars of the transactions of that day, I shall now turn to the early part of it, and relate some circumstances leading thereto.

On the arrival of General Washington's army from the eastward, in order to impede the progress of the British, after their landing on the shores of the Chesapeake, a considerable number of the soldiers were sick in consequence of their long marches through the excessive heat of that season of the year; on that account the commissaries and those who had the charge of the disordered persons, were obliged to take possession of the meeting houses and other public buildings as hospitals to accommodate them. Among the number thus occupied, Birmingham meeting house was to be one, and preparations were making therein for that purpose. First-day morning arrived. Friends assembled as usual, from an expectation that the meeting might be held in the house if it should be taken possession of afterwards: but from the situation of it, their request could not be granted, they therefore got permission to take some of the benches out of the house, and place them under the trees which stood in front thereof, on which they seated themselves in the quiet, as far as was practicable under existing circumstances - as the officers and workmen were moving about and engaged in making preparations to receive the sick, to be brought there as soon as the premises could be got in readiness. After the meeting had sat some time, a female Friend was concerned in public testimony - her communication was solemn and edifying. In the course of it she made mention of the visitation she had experienced when young in years from a kind Providence, who had been her support through every trial and difficulty, both inward and outward, to the present time, and the covenant she had entered into with Him to serve Him as her ability might be afforded through every dispensation she might have to pass, either within the walls of the meeting houses, or out of them, as might be her lot to experience. To me it was a favored time, and I felt thankful in being present. Under these circumstances it became necessary that some other building should be provided to accommodate the meeting in future, until the meeting house should be cleaned and put in order for the purpose, and how soon that would be the case was uncertain from the present gloomy appearance. Several houses and rooms were talked of, but it was finally concluded to hold the next meeting in a large wheelwright shop, which stood on the eminence north of the dwelling house now owned by Philip Price, at a place called Sconnel Town. The next meeting day was on the 11th of the month which proved to be a memorable day....

"Some of the doors of the meeting house were torn off and the wounded carried thereon into the house to be occupied for an hospital, instead of the American sick for which it had been repairing some days previous.

"...Having made mention that the meeting house at Birmingham had been taken out of our possession by the Americans, in order to accommodate the sick soldiers, it so turned out that before they occupied it for that purpose, General Howe had the control of it for the use of his wounded officers, and when vacated, and the army removed, Friends were at liberty to cleanse and purify, which was so far done that we held one meeting it it on the First day following after their departure, but considerable repairs were necessary afterwards, to place it in the condition it was in previous to our being deprived of it."

Prepared by Bart Anderson - July 1958
Curator, Chester County Historical Society

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: This Friend's Meeting house dates from 1763 (with additions) and retains much of its original architectural character.
2. Condition of Fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: One story. Original building 38' by 41' with an 1818 addition making it about 17 1/2' longer.
2. Foundations: Stone.
3. Wall construction: Stone.
4. Chimneys: None in original building.
5. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: One door way to the north to the grave yard walled up. Other double doorways in the south and west original. In 1818 section doorways to the south and east original.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Window openings all seem original.
6. Roof
 - a. Shape, covering: Steeply pitched gable. Original roof of wood shingles. Slate roof put on 1864. In Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa., is a wooden shingle with an oil view of the meetings by a Mrs. Leggett, supposedly done at this time.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: Seem original.

C. Technical Description of Interiors

1. Floor Plans: Original building was one room with sliding partitions. When enlarged in 1818, same plan was carried through, and a new partition put in. Marks of the original can be seen.
2. Flooring: Has been replaced several times.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.

4. Doorways and doors: Apparently original.
5. Trim: Original with the 1818 addition.
6. Hardware: Mostly original.
7. Lighting: Modern electricity.
8. Heating: No fireplaces; heating was originally by stove.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: Faces south. Set well back on the east side of the road with a walled grave yard behind and a school nearby.
2. Enclosures: Grave yards walled.
3. Outbuildings: School
4. Walks, driveways etc.: None, except in grave yards.
5. Landscaping, gardens etc.: Well planted with trees.

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